

This Is The Mansfield That Was

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Demolition crews clearing the site for the new county office building on South Diamond St. removed another old Mansfield landmark which stood for 79 years at the corner of South Diamond and East Second St., Progress claimed another victim and this time it was the old Apostolic Christian Church.

Many senior citizens can vividly recall seeing the horses and rigs of the congregation standing under the shelter of the frame building at the rear of the church off East Second St. as the members attended the services on Sunday. Although considered one of the smaller congregations in the community the Apostolic Christian Church has early roots set-down by a closely knit German congregation.

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Graham's history of the county records that in 1880 a society calling themselves Believers in Christ worshiped in a small church located on East Market Street. The location of this early church was at 219 Park Avenue East. The site, on the northside of the street just east of Foster, is presently occupied by business buildings.

The Believers in Christ congregation was organized in 1850 and meetings were held mostly in the private dwellings of Frederick Lautz and a Mrs. Mimm. Records show that a Mrs. Case and Mrs. Brehm along with several others formed the starting congregation. The first lay minister was Joseph Bella.

The congregation by 1863 felt the need of a church home and so erected a dwelling-type small frame church building at the East Market St. (Park Avenue East) street address at the cost of \$1,500.

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By 1880 the congregation had grown to sixty families and a new church was again needed. Furthermore, a Sunday School was started in 1868 and facilities were needed for this church activity.

Early church members recorded how the congregation would gather on the banks of a small stream which flows into the Rocky Fork near East Mansfield for the baptism service. Believing in immersion, it is recorded that a number of times holes were broken in the ice during the cold winter months so that the

baptism could be performed. Indoor baptism facilities were also needed.

Samuel Sorg and Henry Schwein were Elders of the church when on June 12, 1887 the congregation moved into their new small red brick church pictured above which was built on a large lot at the corner of South Diamond and East Second. Sorg furnished most of the \$6,000 necessary to build the church and two houses, one facing Diamond and the other located near the corner of Second and Franklin. Rental proceeds of the house on South Diamond was for years used by the congregation to support the "worthy needy."

Although services were conducted in the German language until around the beginning of World War I some Ger-

man was spoken in the services until as late as 1957. All services are now conducted in English.

The congregation grew steadily and prominent men such as William Matthes Sr. and Samuel Engwiler served as Elders. Later it was necessary to use the house on Diamond Street for the Sunday School classrooms.

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The little red brick church served the congregation well for seventy eight years but again it was necessary to build a new church. On April 4, 1965 the last services were held in the old church. At this last service four were baptized.

The congregation moved into their new beautiful modern church at 60 North Illi-

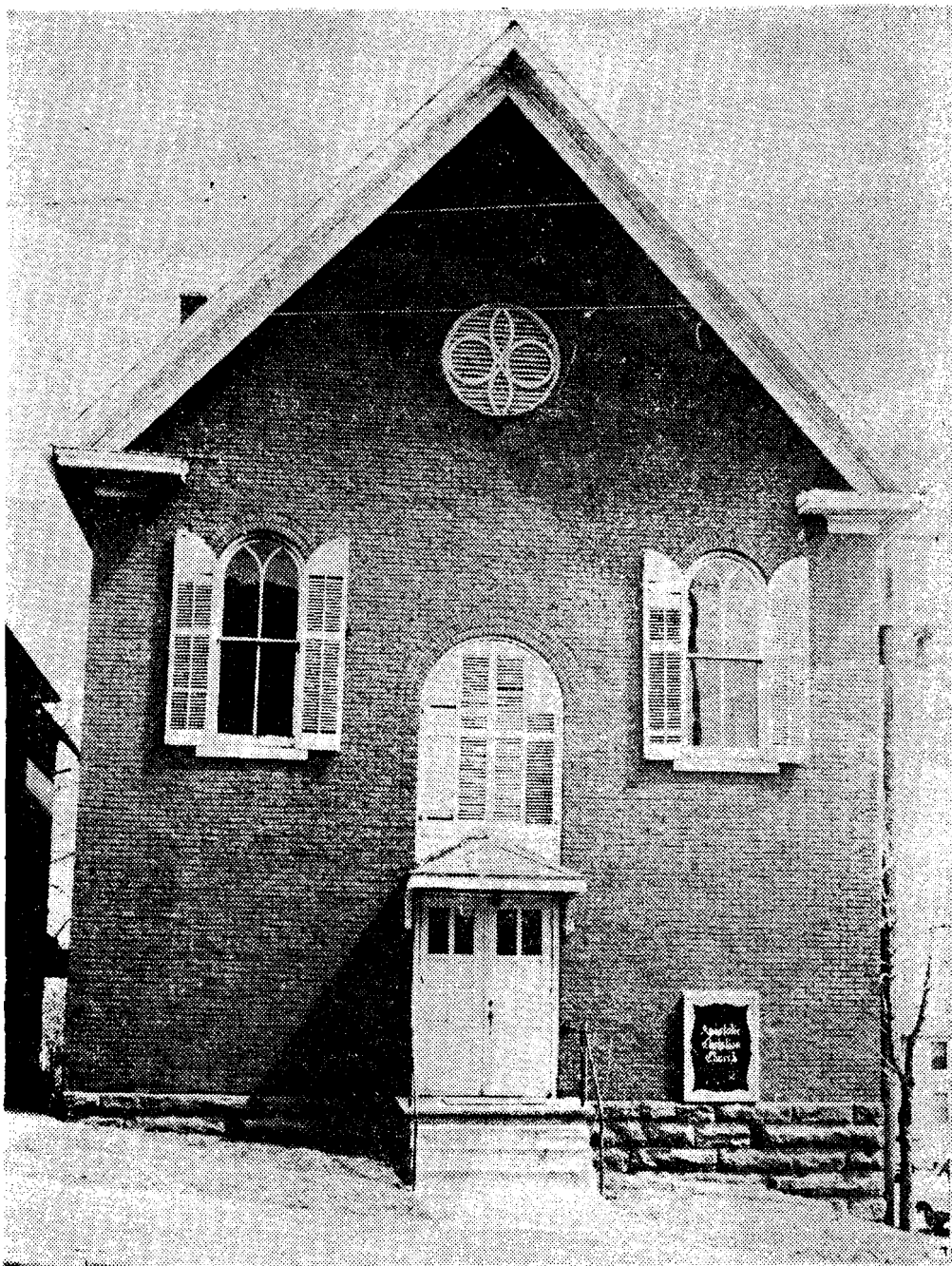
nois Ave. with dedication services held September 5, 1965.

The old church building and the two church houses were purchased by the County Commissioners and workmen razed the buildings recently to make way for the new county office building.

Henry Sabo has served the congregation as minister for the past 30 years and he is presently assisted by Robert Beer, Ben Stavenik and Kenneth Sauder.

Katherine Matthes Houston, Jesse Beer, Simon Beer, Bertha Matthes, and Anna Engwiler have the unique distinction of attending services in all three of the churches built by the Believers in Christ and Apostolic Christian congregation.

(Courtesy of Richland County Historical Society.)



The old Apostolic Christian Church